

Chinese incursions highest since 1996

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A Chinese H-6 bomber flies near the median line of the Taiwan Strait on Sept. 18 last year.

Photo: Reuters

The number of Chinese incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) last year was the highest since 1996, with the majority of them occurring in the zone's southwest, a government-funded report has said.

Chinese military aircraft entered the nation's ADIZ on 91 days from Jan. 1 to Nov. 30, the Institute for National Defense and Security Research said in a report on the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Last year also saw the highest number of long-distance training missions by the Chinese military around Taiwan, the institute said, citing just six and 20 missions in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

During the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait missile crisis, China conducted a series of ballistic missile tests in the waters around Taiwan in the run-up to the nation's first direct presidential election.

Ministry of National Defense spokesman Major General Shih Shun-wen (石純文) has said that the PLA flew about 380 sorties into the southwest ADIZ last year, a trend that has not been seen in the past.

The institute, which is affiliated with the ministry, said the Chinese intrusions are connected to the frequency of US military activities in the area, and are a warning over the warming of relations between Taiwan and the US.

There could be several reasons for the increase in intrusions, one of which is that China might be testing Taiwan's military response capabilities, as the median line of the Taiwan Strait does

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not extend into the southwest ADIZ.

The PLA's actions are also an effort to increase its presence in an attempt to expand China's sphere of influence, the institute said.

Another reason could be to intimidate the Taiwanese military and exert pressure on its defenses on the Pratas Islands (Dongsha Islands, 東沙島) in the South China Sea.

An important factor to consider is that China is using marine patrol aircraft to collect underwater and other related information in the area, which is the main passageway for vessels and submarines entering the western Pacific, it said.

The PLA is also hoping to deter Taiwanese and US submarine activity in the region, it added.

The institute said that in the long-term, the intrusions could offer Taiwan certain advantages, such as increasing the legitimacy of US sales of offensive weapons to Taiwan.

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